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To see that each individual, regardless of his/her race, color, religious creed, marital status, military status, handicap, children, national origin, sex, age, ancestry, sexual preference or source of income shall have equal access to housing; and to encourage and bring about mutual understanding and respect among all individuals in the City by the elimination of prejudice, intolerance, bigotry and discrimination in the area of housing.

How Can I Help?

Fairness in housing is the law and is everyone's right. If you would like to help your community learn about fair housing, you could:

- arrange to have a speaker from BFHC
- become informed about fair housing law
- write letters to the editor of your community newspaper to let people know that their neighbors support fair housing
- inform potential discriminators that discrimination is against the law and subject to enforcement penalties
- contact your elected representatives to tell them that you support fair housing
- encourage victims of discrimination to file their complaints

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circa 1986

Cyndi Koebert

The Boston Fair Housing Commission

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Room 957 of Boston City Hall
725-4408

CITY OF BOSTON PRINTING SECTION

What is Boston's Fair Housing Law?

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What is the Boston Fair Housing Commission?

Established by City Ordinance in 1982, the Boston Fair Housing Commission is an agency of Boston city government charged with the enforcement of the Fair Housing Law.

Investigations

The Boston Fair Housing Commission investigates complaints brought by individuals, groups or agencies who believe that discrimination has occurred. Trained investigators analyze information gathered from interviews and records to determine if there is "probable cause" or strong evidence of housing discrimination.

Throughout the investigation those charged with the discriminatory act are given ample opportunity to present their cases and to resolve the matter directly with the person filing the complaint.

In the majority of cases where a full investigation is conducted, the complaint is resolved through conciliation or mediation. Conciliations have resulted in financial settlements for complainants, tenancy or purchase of the dwellings in question, and agreements to bring sales or rental practices into conformity with fair housing law.

Fair Housing Law Enforcement

When a discrimination complaint cannot be resolved through mediation or conciliation, the Commission may:

- hold a formal public hearing
- refer the case to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, *or*
- refer the case to an attorney

Compliance

Through such programs as Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing Plan reviews, the Boston Fair Housing Commission monitors housing programs in Boston to measure compliance with fair housing laws.

The Commission also sponsors auditing programs, in which "testers" are assigned to audit or "test" real estate transactions in Boston's neighborhoods. The auditing program provides information on the level of discrimination and produces evidence of its occurrence.

Education

The Boston Fair Housing Commission offers a range of activities to educate the public about fair housing:

- training programs and films for City Staff and community agencies
- publication of reports and studies
- mailings in response to fair housing issues
- neighborhood hearings
- public service announcement on radio and television

Coordination

The Fair Housing Commission maintains strong formal and informal ties to public and private agencies concerned with fair housing through regular communication, joint programs, advocacy, formal memoranda of agreement, and mutual support. Among the groups with which the Fair Housing Commission works most closely are:

- Boston Police Department Community Disorders Unit
- Neighborhood Housing Coalitions in numerous Boston neighborhoods and communities including Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, Hyde Park, and the Southeast Asian community.
- The Greater Boston Real Estate Board
- The Boston Housing Authority
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

What is Prohibited?

It is against the law to do any of the following based on race, color, religious creed, marital status, military status, handicap, children, national origin, sex, age, ancestry, sexual preference or source of income.

- refuse to rent
- deny access
- deny availability
- discriminate in terms of conditions
- treat disparately
- deny professional real estate services
- discriminate in advertising
- discriminate in written or oral inquiries or records
- redline
- blockbust
- interfere with the free exercise of an individual's civil rights

What is Allowed?

- The Greater Boston Real Estate Board has defined the following standards for tenant selection:

  "Simply stated, there are only two criteria by which you should judge someone seeking or using rental housing: 1) ability to pay the rent and 2) ability to respect the rights of others . . ."
- landlords, sellers and agents may adopt any reasonable standard as long as that standard is applied uniformly to every applicant and the protected characteristics are not considered in the selection process.

How Can I File A Complaint?

Discrimination in housing can be very subtle. If you have any questions in your mind about a possible case of housing discrimination, come to our offices in Room 957 of Boston City Hall or call:

725-4408